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THE HOUSE ARMED
SERVICES COMMITTEE

STATEMENT
OF
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UNITED STATES MARINE CORPS
BEFORE THE
MILITARY PERSONNEL SUBCOMMITTEE
OF THE
HOUSE ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE
CONCERNING
RECRUITING, RETENTION & END STRENGTH
ON
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Chairwoman Davis, Congressman Wilson, and distinguished Members of the Subcommittee, it is my privilege to appear before you today to provide an update on Marine Corps recruiting, retention, and end strength.

I. Introduction

We remain a Corps of Marines at war with over 22,000 Marines deployed in support of Operations IRAQI FREEDOM and ENDURING FREEDOM. The young men and women who fill our ranks today recognize the global, protracted, and lethal nature of the challenges facing our Nation, and their dedicated service and sacrifice rival that of any generation preceding them. The individual Marine is our Corps' most sacred resource.

Over the past several years, sustained deployments in Iraq, Afghanistan, and across the globe have kept many Marines in the operating forces deployed as much as they have been home. They have shouldered our Nation's burden and done so with amazing resiliency. Marines understand what is required of the Nation's elite warrior class — to stand up and be counted when the Nation needs them the most. For this, we owe them our unending gratitude.

Marines and their families know that their sacrifices are making a difference, that they are part of something much larger than themselves, and that their Nation stands behind them. Thanks to your continued support, your Marines will stay resolved to fight and defeat any foe today or in the future.

II. End Strength

Active Component End Strength. The Marine Corps grew by over 12,000 Marines in Fiscal Year 2008 and currently stands at approximately 200,600. We are on pace to reach an active duty end strength of 202,000 by the end of Fiscal Year 2009 – two years ahead of schedule. This historic growth can be attributed to three factors: quality recruiting, historic

retention levels, and reduced attrition. Based on building a robust Delayed Entry Pool Program, we expect that these trends will continue into Fiscal Year 2010 allowing us to sustain a 202,000 end strength. While the state of the Nation's economy is a concern for all of us, we expect that it will also positively impact both recruiting and retention this year.

We are currently ahead of Fiscal Year 2008 in first term enlistments and are on track with our career reenlistments; our recruiting standards remain high. Attrition levels are projected to remain at or below Fiscal Year 2008 rates. Sustaining the 202,000 end strength will enable your Corps to train to the full spectrum of military operations and improve the ability of the Marine Corps to address future challenges. This growth will also enable us to increase the dwell time of our Marines so that they are able to operate at a "sustained rate of fire." Our goal is to achieve a 1:2 deployment-to-dwell ratio for all of our active forces - for every seven months a Marine is deployed, he or she will be back at home station for at least fourteen months.

Funding. The Marine Corps greatly appreciates the increase in authorized end strength to 194,000 passed in the Fiscal Year 2009 National Defense Authorization Act. As you know, we are funding the end strength in excess of 194,000 through supplemental appropriations.

As you know, the vast majority of our personnel budget is spent on entitlements, including compensation. Compensation is a double-edged sword in that it is a principal factor for Marines both when they decide to reenlist and when they decide not to reenlist. Private sector competition will always seek to capitalize on the military training and education provided to our Marines. Marines are a highly desirable labor resource for private sector organizations. Competitive and flexible compensation authorities aid the Marine Corps in targeting specific areas and provide the capability to access, retain and separate as needed. Your support for our Enlistment Bonus and Selective Reenlistment Bonus programs has made a difference and will be

a key to sustaining our end strength and insuring the viability of the Total Force. We appreciate the continued support of Congress in the creation of flexible compensation authorities which allow the Marine Corps to shape your Corps for the 21st Century.

Reserve Component End Strength. Our Reserves have continued to make essential contributions to our Total Force efforts in The Long War, particularly in Iraq and Afghanistan. During the past fiscal year, as we accelerated our build to 202,000 Active Component Marines, we understood that we would take some risk with regard to obtaining our Reserve Component end strength of 39,600. As a result we came in under our authorized limit by 2,077. During the 202,000 build-up, we adjusted our accession plans and encouraged our experienced and combat tested Reserve Marines to transition back to active duty to support these efforts. And they responded in force: From 2007 to present, approximately 1,946 returned to active duty or are awaiting return.

As a Total Force Marine Corps, we rely heavily upon the essential augmentation and reinforcement provided by our Reserve Marines. We believe our authorized end strength of 39,600 is appropriate and provides us with the Marines we require to support the force and to achieve our goal of a 1:5 deployment-to-dwell ratio. With the achievement of a 202,000 Active Component force, we will refocus our recruiting and retention efforts toward our authorized Reserve Component end strength. The bonus and incentives provided by Congress and specifically the authorization to reimburse travel expenses to select members attending drill will be key tools in helping achieve this goal.

III. Recruiting

Our Recruiters continue to make their recruiting goals in all areas in support of our Total Force recruiting mission. This past year, we continued our efforts to “grow the force” and build an active component 21st century Marine Corps of 202,000. Our focus in Fiscal Year 2009 will be to continue to recruit quality men and women with the right character, commitment, and drive into our Corps.

To meet the challenges in today’s recruiting environment, it is imperative that we maintain our high standards both for our recruiters and those who volunteer to serve in our Corps. The Corps must continue to be comprised of the best and brightest of America's youth. We must also remain mindful that the Marine Corps needs to reflect the face of the nation and be representative of those we serve. Our image of a smart, tough, elite warrior continues to resonate with young people seeking to become Marines.

The Marine Corps is unique in that all recruiting efforts (officer, enlisted, regular, reserve, and prior-service) fall under the direction of the Marine Corps Recruiting Command. Operationally, this provides us with tremendous flexibility and unity of command in order to annually meet our objectives. In Fiscal Year 2008, the Marine Corps achieved 100 percent of the enlisted (regular and reserve) ship mission (accessions). In terms of quality, Marine Corps Recruiting Command accessed over 95 percent Tier 1 high school diploma graduates and over 66 percent in the upper Mental Groups of I-IIAs. In short, we accomplished our recruiting mission, achieved the Commandant’s quality standards, and exceeded Department of Defense quality standards.

In Fiscal Year 2009, the Total Force accessions mission is 39,296 and, as of 1 February 2009, we have shipped (accessed) 12,718 applicants, representing over 103 percent of our Total Force mission fiscal year to date. Although recruiting is highly dynamic and fluid, we expect to

meet our annual recruiting mission this fiscal year, to include all quality goals. Additionally, we continue to exceed our contracting goals for this fiscal year which ensures we have a population of qualified individuals ready to ship to recruit training as we enter Fiscal Year 2010. Achieving this success, as always, is dependent on your support for our enlistment incentives. We thank you for this support both now and in the future.

Our Officer Selection Teams were also successful in Fiscal Year 2008, accessing 1,900 Second Lieutenants for 100 percent of their assigned mission. In Fiscal Year 2009, we are continuing efforts to attract Officer Candidates and commission Second Lieutenants commensurate with our end strength requirements. To assist our Officer Selection Officers in meeting their Officer Accession missions and attract prospective candidates we are continuing to leverage two programs that were introduced in 2007: The College Loan Repayment Program which provides up to \$30,000 of undergraduate student loans for graduating college seniors upon commission as a Second Lieutenant and the Officer Accessions Incentive which provides \$4,000 to college graduates (Officer Candidate Course and Enlisted Commissioning Program) upon commission as a Second Lieutenant.

For the Reserve Component, the Marine Corps achieved its Fiscal Year 2008 reserve enlisted recruiting goals with the accession of 4,235 non-prior service Marines and 4,501 Prior Service Marines. As of 1 February 2009, we have accessed 1,756 non-prior service and 1,227 enlisted prior service Marines, which reflects 48 percent of our annual enlisted mission. Again, we expect to meet our reserve recruiting goals this year. Officer recruiting for our Selected Marine Corps Reserve units is traditionally our greatest challenge. To date, the Officer Candidate Course – Reserve has proven to be the most successful of our reserve officer recruiting programs, specifically focusing on ground-related billets tied to the Force Generation

Model. Under this program, individuals attend Officer Candidates School, The Basic School, a Military Occupational Specialty school, and return to a reserve unit to serve. We commissioned 56 Second Lieutenants in the Reserve in fiscal Year 2008, and anticipate commissioning between 50 and 75 more this fiscal year.

IV. Retention

Retention complements recruiting as one of the vital elements of building and sustaining the Marine Corps. For enlisted retention, we seek to retain the best and brightest Marines in both our First Term and Career Force to provide the proven technical skills, experience, and Non-Commissioned Officer and Staff Noncommissioned Officer leadership needed to meet our demanding mission. In Fiscal Year 2008, the Marine Corps reenlisted 16,696 Marines including an unprecedented 8,243 First Term Marines. This achievement represented the highest retention rate, almost 36 percent, among the eligible First Term population compared to 31 percent in Fiscal Year 2007 and 22 percent in Fiscal Year 2006. Similarly, the Marine Corps achieved a remarkable 77 percent retention rate among the eligible career force compared with 70 percent in Fiscal Year 2007 and 65 percent in Fiscal Year 2006. This achievement contributed to exceeding the annual milestone in our end strength increase plan while maintaining all quality standards.

For Fiscal Year 2009, retention achievement remains exceptionally strong. As of 17 February 2009, we have achieved 7,057 First Term Alignment Plan reenlistments, over 96 percent of the 7,334 goal. Equally impressive, we have achieved 6,992 Subsequent Term Alignment Plan reenlistments, over 93 percent of the 7,464 goal. Altogether, we have achieved 14,049 total reenlistments, or nearly 95 percent of the combined goals. Our continuing retention success remains largely attributable to two important, enduring themes: First, Marines are truly

motivated to “stay Marine” because they are doing what they signed up to do — fighting for and protecting our Nation. Second, they understand our service culture is one that rewards proven performance and takes care of its own.

In regard to the Reserves, officer retention is above historical norms. However, enlisted retention remains below historical norms in part due to the priority of building an Active Component end strength of 202,000. For Fiscal Year 2009, we foresee continued higher retention in the Active Component which will impact the number of Marines transitioning into the Reserves, but we are no longer making a concerted effort to draw personnel from the Reserves to increase our active forces. We are refocusing our efforts on increasing Reserve end strength and are reviewing the best ways to accomplish this. In this regard, we appreciate the reenlistment incentives provided in the Fiscal Year 2009 National Defense Authorization Act.

V. Conclusion

As we continue to fight the Long War, the Marine Corps will be required to meet many commitments, both at home and abroad. While we have, to date, made impressive strides toward our Fiscal Year recruiting, retention, and end strength goals, we must remember that this is a Total Force effort; it is individual Marines who are our most precious asset – and we must continue to attract and retain the best and brightest into our ranks.

Marines are proud of what they do. They are proud of the “Eagle, Globe, and Anchor” and what it represents to our country. With your support, a vibrant Marine Corps will continue to meet our Nation’s call.

Thank you for the opportunity to present this testimony.